



Home Office

Firearms Safety Consultation

Government response

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Introduction

This document provides a summary of responses to the consultation paper '*Firearms Safety*', published by the Home Office on 24 November 2020.

It covers:

- the background to the consultation,
- a summary of the consultation responses,
- a detailed response to the specific questions raised in the consultation, and
- the next steps following this consultation.

Background

The Firearms Safety consultation paper was published on 24 November 2020. It invited comments on a range of firearms safety issues which were raised with the Government during the passage through Parliament of the Offensive Weapons Act 2019. The paper sought views on proposals for how the law might be changed to mitigate the public safety risks potentially raised by these particular issues.

The proposals were in respect of:

High Muzzle Energy rifles

In response to concerns about the potential for serious misuse and loss of life if particularly powerful firearms, described here as High Muzzle Energy rifles, were to fall into the hands of criminals or terrorists, the Government sought the public's views on what level of enhanced security would sufficiently reduce the risk of High Muzzle Energy rifles being stolen and misused.

Air weapons

Although most air weapons are not licensed, they are firearms and they are regulated by firearms legislation to prevent their misuse. Following the tragic death of 13-year old Benjamin Wragge, who was killed accidentally with an air weapon in 2016, the Government conducted a review of the controls on air weapons. The Firearms Safety consultation summarised the responses to that review and sought views on the Government's proposals for change. The proposals relate to the possession of air weapons by under-18s, secure storage and the safekeeping of air weapons.

Miniature rifle ranges

There is an exemption in firearms law which allows a person to run a rifle range or shooting gallery where only small calibre rifles or air weapons are used, without the need for a firearms licence. Additionally, members of the public do not need a firearms licence to shoot at such a range or gallery. This exemption is widely used to introduce people to target shooting. However, law enforcement had raised concerns that the exemption may allow unsuitable people to gain access to firearms, with consequent public safety risks. The consultation sought views on improving the controls on miniature rifle ranges while retaining the benefits that miniature rifle ranges present to shooting sports. The key proposal was that anyone who wishes to operate a miniature rifle range must apply for a firearm certificate and undergo the necessary police checks into their background and security.

Ammunition

Law enforcement had raised concerns about the availability of component parts of ammunition, and how criminals could use them to unlawfully manufacture full rounds of ammunition. The key components of ammunition – the propellant and primer – are already controlled, and there are offences relating to the unlawful possession of complete ammunition.

The consultation sought views on whether these controls remain sufficient or whether they should be strengthened. Specifically, whether the possession of component parts of ammunition with intent to manufacture unauthorised quantities of complete rounds of ammunition should be made an offence.

The consultation period closed on 16 February 2021 and this report summarises the responses, including how the consultation process influenced the further development of the proposals consulted upon.

The impact assessments accompanying the consultation have been updated and can be found at [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

A Welsh language version of this summary can be found at [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

A list of the organisations that responded is at Annex A.

Summary of responses

We received a total of 12,758 responses to the consultation, comprising 12,293 completed online survey responses and 465 responses by e-mail. Partially completed online survey responses are omitted on the basis that the respondent did not reach the end of the survey to confirm they were ready to formally submit their response. No responses were received by post.

Responses came from a range of stakeholders. Around two thirds (67.7%) of respondents were categorised as members of the public. Almost one quarter (22.8%) of respondents self-identified as members of the shooting community.

A breakdown of the respondent categories is displayed in the table below:

	Responses	Percentage
Animal Welfare	22	0.2%
Firearms Dealer	176	1.4%
Law Enforcement	39	0.3%
Members of the Public	8,636	67.7%
Other	660	5.2%
Shooting Community	2,905	22.8%
Shooting Organisation	320	2.5%
Total	12,758	100.1%

Please note that not all percentages in this document will total to 100% due to rounding errors.

‘Shooting organisation’ includes anyone who self-reported that they were representing or affiliated with an association or body involved with shooting issues.

‘Shooting community’ includes anyone who self-reported that they were a gun user, a firearms certificate holder or affiliated with a shooting range or rifle club. This category also includes those with occupations involving gun use, such as pest control and farming.

‘Firearms dealer’ includes anyone who self-reported to be involved in gun trading, including gunmakers and registered firearms dealers.

‘Law enforcement’ includes anyone who self-reported to be an active member of law enforcement agencies.

‘Member of the public’ includes anyone who self-identified as members of the public or anyone who did not explicitly associate themselves with shooting.

‘Other’ includes any respondent where clear information was not available (most e-mail respondents) or anyone whose position/expertise did not match the above categories (for example, retired law enforcement officers or firearms journalists).

Responses to specific questions

This section summarises responses to the specific questions posed in the consultation paper. The total number of responses varies by question, as many respondents did not provide a response to every question. It will be highlighted where applicable if particular categories of respondent differ from the overall response, rather than providing a breakdown of response by category of respondent for every question.

Section 1: High Muzzle Energy Rifles

Q1. To what extent do you consider that the present level 3 security requirements, if specified in rules made by the Secretary of State, would be sufficient to mitigate the risks posed by high muzzle energy rifles?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	8,608	69%
Agree	1,759	14%
Neither agree nor	865	7%
Disagree	396	3%
Strongly disagree	799	6%
Total	12,427	99%

A majority (83%) of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that current level 3 security requirements would be sufficient to mitigate the risks posed by high muzzle energy rifles.

9% of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed that level 3 security requirements would be sufficient.

There were no meaningful differences in response between categories of respondents for this question.

Q2. If you do not consider level 3 security would adequately address the risks, to what extent do you consider that the following additional security conditions could be relevant to the safe storage and use of these rifles?

Please note that this question was available to all respondents regardless of their answer to the previous question. This was on the basis that even if a respondent answered previously that level 3 security was sufficient, we wanted to give the respondent the opportunity to voice their opinion on the following measures.

A. Fitting shutters and grilles on all doors and windows?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	130	2%
Agree	201	3%
Neither agree nor	646	11%
Disagree	1,389	23%
Strongly disagree	3,546	60%
Total	5,912	99%

A majority (83%) of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed that fitting shutters or grilles on doors and windows would be relevant to storing and using high muzzle energy rifles safely. There was a particularly high percentage (90%) of disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this measure from respondents who were categorised as Firearms Dealers.

5% of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that shutters or grilles would be relevant.

B. Installing CCTV

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	436	7%
Agree	1,081	18%
Neither agree nor	1,143	19%
Disagree	1,051	18%
Strongly disagree	2,277	38%
Total	5,988	100%

Over half (56%) of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed that installing CCTV would be relevant to safe storage and use of high muzzle energy rifles.

One quarter (25%) of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that installing CCTV would be relevant. This rises to half (50%) for respondents who were categorised as Law Enforcement, although only a small number (28) of respondents from Law Enforcement answered this question.

Firearms Safety

C. Panic alarms available where the rifle is stored?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	222	4%
Agree	561	9%
Neither agree nor	1,088	18%
Disagree	1,376	23%
Strongly disagree	2,694	45%
Total	5,941	99%

Over two thirds (68%) of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed that panic alarms where the rifle is stored were relevant to safe storage and use of high muzzle energy rifles.

13% of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that panic alarms were relevant to where the rifle is stored.

There were no meaningful differences in response between categories of respondents for this question.

D. Panic alarms available when the rifle is in use on a range?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	140	2%
Agree	359	6%
Neither agree nor	866	15%
Disagree	1,444	25%
Strongly disagree	3,082	52%
Total	5,891	100%

Over three quarters (77%) of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed that panic alarms available when a rifle is in use on a range would be relevant to safe storage and usage. 81% of respondents categorised as Shooting Organisations disagreed or strongly disagreed with this measure.

8% of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that panic alarms when a rifle is in use on a range would be relevant.

E. The bolt or other critical component parts be kept separately.

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	1,569	26%
Agree	2,089	34%
Neither agree nor	727	12%
Disagree	485	8%
Strongly disagree	1,214	20%
Total	6,084	100%

60% of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that keeping the bolt or other critical component parts separately would be relevant to safe storage and use of high muzzle energy rifles.

Over one quarter (28%) of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed that this would be relevant to safe use and storage.

There were no meaningful differences in response between categories of respondents for this question.

F. If viable, and with a change in the law or certificate conditions, other members of the holder's shooting club to look after critical components on behalf of each other?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	198	3%
Agree	403	7%
Neither agree nor	769	13%
Disagree	1,212	20%
Strongly disagree	3,440	57%
Total	6,022	100%

Over three quarters (77%) of respondents who answered this question either disagreed or strongly disagreed that other members of the shooting club looking after critical components for each other would be relevant to safe use and storage of the rifles.

10% of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that this would be relevant.

There were no meaningful differences in response between categories of respondents for this question.

Firearms Safety

G. *Ammunition to be kept separate from the gun in a separate cabinet and only a small number of rounds of ammunition allowed?*

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	634	10%
Agree	1,415	23%
Neither agree nor	910	15%
Disagree	1,160	19%
Strongly disagree	1,952	32%
Total	6,071	99%

Over half (51%) of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed that keeping ammunition in a separate cabinet from the gun and allowing only a small amount of ammunition would be relevant to safe use and storage of the rifles.

One third (33%) of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that this measure would be relevant. Agreeing or strongly agreeing with this measure was higher for respondents categorised as Law Enforcement (50%) and Shooting Organisations (42%).

Q3. To what extent would it be preferable/viable to require these rifles to be stored only at a gun club?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	381	3%
Agree	130	1%
Neither agree nor	365	3%
Disagree	1,416	11%
Strongly disagree	10,114	82%
Total	12,406	100%

A majority (93%) of respondents who answered this question strongly disagreed or disagreed that it would be preferable or viable to require High Muzzle Energy rifles to be stored only at a gun club.

4% of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that this measure would be preferable or viable.

There were no meaningful differences in response between categories of respondents for this question.

Q4. To what extent would it be preferable/viable to require these rifles to be stored only by a registered firearms dealer?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	330	3%
Agree	76	1%
Neither agree nor	275	2%
Disagree	1,135	9%
Strongly disagree	10,588	85%
Total	12,404	100%

A majority (94%) of respondents who answered this question strongly disagreed or disagreed that it would be preferable or viable for High Muzzle Energy rifles to be stored only by a registered firearms dealer. 96% of respondents categorised as a Firearms Dealer strongly disagreed or disagreed with this measure.

4% of respondents who answered this question strongly agreed or agreed that this measure would be preferable or viable.

Section 2: Air Weapons

Q6. To what extent do you agree that the Government should remove the exception that permits unsupervised possession of air weapons by under 18s on private land?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	854	7%
Agree	894	7%
Neither agree nor	725	6%
Disagree	1,699	13%
Strongly disagree	8,468	67%
Total	12,640	100%

80% of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed that the exception permitting unsupervised possession of air weapons by under 18s on private land should be removed. 82% of respondents categorised as Members of the Public disagreed or strongly disagreed with this measure.

14% of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that this exception should be removed.

Q7. To what extent do you agree that the Government should clarify the offence of failing to take 'reasonable precautions' to prevent minors from having air weapons so that whenever under-18s are on the premises, 'reasonable precautions' must include locking the air weapon out of sight when not in use and storing the ammunition separately?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	4,933	39%
Agree	3,147	25%
Neither agree nor	1,050	8%
Disagree	1,160	9%
Strongly disagree	2,346	19%
Total	12,636	100%

Almost two thirds (64%) of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that the Government should clarify that 'reasonable precautions' must include locking air weapons out of sight and storing ammunition separately. This was slightly higher (69%) among respondents categorised as Shooting Organisations.

28% of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed that this clarification should be made.

Q8. To what extent do you agree that the Government should work with industry to improve the safe keeping and handling of air weapons, to ensure that home security devices are supplied with all new air weapons; and that dealers should explain the importance of secure handling and storage to purchasers of new air weapons at the point of sale?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	1,859	15%
Agree	7,193	57%
Neither agree nor	1,273	10%
Disagree	884	7%
Strongly disagree	1,425	11%
Total	12,634	100%

Almost three quarters (72%) of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that the Government should work with the industry to improve the measures outlined in question 8. 77% of respondents categorised as Shooting Organisations agreed or strongly agreed with this question. There was a lower percentage (65%) for respondents categorised as Firearms Dealers.

18% of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed with this approach.

Section 3: Miniature rifle ranges

Q10. To what extent do you agree that a person should be required to obtain a firearm certificate in order to operate a miniature rifle range?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	3,083	25%
Agree	6,037	48%
Neither agree nor	896	7%
Disagree	900	7%
Strongly disagree	1,627	13%
Total	12,543	100%

Almost three quarters (73%) of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that a person operating a miniature rifle range should obtain a firearm certificate. Over three quarters (78%) of respondents categorised as Shooting Organisations agreed or strongly agreed with this measure.

20% of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed with this measure.

Q11. To what extent do you agree that only rifles not exceeding .22 rimfire should be considered as miniature rifles for the purposes of the provision?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	2,422	19%
Agree	6,823	55%
Neither agree nor	1,299	10%
Disagree	754	6%
Strongly disagree	1,213	10%
Total	12,511	100%

Almost three quarters (74%) of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that only rifles not exceeding .22 rimfire should be considered as miniature rifles for the purpose outlined.

16% of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed with this approach. Almost one third (30%) of respondents categorised as Law Enforcement disagreed or strongly disagreed with this measure.

Q12. To what extent do you agree that self-loading .22 rimfire rifles should not be considered miniature rifles for the purposes of the provision?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	1,174	9%
Agree	1,160	9%
Neither agree nor	1,327	11%
Disagree	2,031	16%
Strongly disagree	6,827	55%
Total	12,519	100%

Almost three quarters (71%) of respondents who answered this question disagreed or strongly disagreed that self-loading .22 rimfire rifles should not be considered miniature rifles.

18% of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that self-loading .22 rimfires should not be considered miniature rifles. This percentage was higher amongst respondents categorised as Shooting Organisations (21%) and Shooting Community (22%).

Section 4: Ammunition

Q14. To what extent do you consider that the possession of component parts of ammunition with intent to manufacture unauthorised quantities of complete rounds of ammunition should be made an offence?

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	1,729	14%
Agree	6,072	48%
Neither agree nor disagree	1,179	9%
Disagree	1,162	9%
Strongly disagree	2,399	19%
Total	12,541	99%

62% of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that possession of component parts of ammunition with intent to manufacture unauthorised quantities of complete rounds of ammunition should be made an offence.

Over one quarter (28%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that this should be made an offence. This percentage was higher amongst respondents categorised as Firearms Dealers (34%), Law Enforcement (32%) and Shooting Community (31%).

Impact Assessment, Equalities and Welsh Language

Impact Assessment

Updated impact assessments setting out how these proposals are likely to affect businesses, charities, the voluntary sector or the public sector can be found at [gov.uk](#).

Equalities

The consultation sought views on whether and how the proposals might impact people with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010. The points raised are discussed in the updated impact assessments.

Welsh Language Impact Test

A Welsh language version of the consultation paper was published at the same time as the English version. No responses were received that raised any issues specific to Wales or Welsh-speakers. A Welsh language version of this summary can be found at [gov.uk](#).

Conclusion and next steps

The Government welcomes the responses to this consultation and would like to thank everyone who took the time to send their views.

High Muzzle Energy rifles

In response to concerns about the potential for serious misuse and loss of life if particularly powerful firearms, described here as High Muzzle Energy rifles (HME rifles), were to fall into the hands of criminals or terrorists, provision was made in the Offensive Weapons Bill to prohibit all rifles capable of discharging a bullet with kinetic energy of more than 13,600 joules at the muzzle of the weapon. This was extensively debated in Parliament during the early stages of the Bill when concerns were raised regarding the proportionality of prohibiting HME rifles. After further consideration, the provision in the Bill was subsequently withdrawn on the basis that the Government would test the alternatives further through a public consultation.

It was suggested instead that enhanced security around their storage and transportation would sufficiently mitigate the risk of theft and misuse and the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 amended the Firearms Act 1968 accordingly. This created a duty on the Secretary of State to make rules prescribing minimum security conditions for safe storage and transportation of HME rifles, which would be attached to the owners' firearm certificate. Before making the rules, the Secretary of State must consult persons likely to be affected by them.

The Government sought views on what level of enhanced security would sufficiently reduce the risk of HME rifles being stolen and misused. A majority (83%) of respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed that stipulating level 3 security requirements, as set out in the [Firearms Security Handbook 2020](#) would be sufficient to mitigate the risks. This will require the rifle to be kept in a secure gun cabinet; the fitting of secure locking systems on exit doors and all accessible windows; the installation of an intruder alarm that alerts the police in the event of a burglary; and the separate storage of ammunition and easily removable component parts. A minority (9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed and some suggested that such weapons should be banned to prevent misuse by licensed owners themselves.

Although the risk of HME rifles being sought by extreme or terrorist groups cannot be discounted, respondents pointed out that such rifles are unlikely to be attractive to criminals as the HME rifles are bulky, very heavy and difficult to operate and even more difficult to conceal. The single case of one being stolen in recent years was not a targeted theft and law enforcement representatives confirmed that shotguns and handguns are the firearms most sought by organised crime groups. Security should therefore be proportionate and take account of all factors, dependent upon the individual circumstances of each case. The police are well versed in dealing with security concerns in respect of firearms and identifying local or national threats, and level 3 security would allow them to set whatever levels of security they deemed to be necessary.

There was no clear majority in favour of adding additional requirements beyond level 3 for these rifles, bearing in mind that this level of security is deemed sufficient for the storage of firearms prohibited under section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968. Of those who responded, a majority (ranging from 51% to 93%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that most of the measures suggested would be relevant. Keeping the bolt or other critical component parts separately was the only measure that a majority (60%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed would be relevant.

The main reasons put forward were:

- a requirement for shutters, grilles and CCTV would place an unreasonable cost burden upon certificate holders. It may be impractical in conservation areas or listed buildings and could draw attention to a property as potentially containing items worth stealing;
- panic alarms are impractical on the remote ranges where HME rifle users shoot;
- it was already best practice and not unreasonable to require a critical component such as the bolt or breechblock to be kept separately from the receiver of the rifle in transport and if appropriate, in storage;
- it was unreasonable and impractical for parts of a certificate holder's rifle to be stored by other club members or by a registered firearms dealer (RFD). This would necessitate components having to be retrieved possibly several days before a shoot, perhaps only during RFD opening hours, returned afterwards and stored at the certificate holder's premises in the interim;
- the amount of ammunition that a certificate holder can possess is already regulated and is usually stored separately as best practice;
- the ranges used in long range target shooting are in remote locations. Even if facilities for storage of rifles were available, they would be far more vulnerable to theft. Moreover, firearms concentrated in a single location are more likely to attract an attack.

Taking into account the responses received, **the Government intends using section 53 of the Firearms Act 1968 to mandate level 3 security for HME rifles through a change to the Firearms Rules**. Alongside this change, the Firearms Security Handbook will be amended to ensure that the possession of HME rifles is a risk factor for the application of level 3 security measures and that consideration is given to the separate storage and transportation of essential components and ammunition.

Air Weapons

Most air weapons in England and Wales do not need to be licensed to allow possession provided they are lower-powered, which means that they are capable of discharging a missile with a kinetic energy of 12 ft pounds or less for air rifles and 6 ft pounds or less for air pistols. However, there is legislation, regulation and guidance which apply to the possession of air weapons, governing how they may be used and by whom, and setting age limits for their possession.

Firearms Safety

The consultation proposals on air weapons followed the earlier review of air weapons regulation in England and Wales. The review took place as a result of recommendations made by the coroner regarding the death of 13-year old Benjamin Wragge, who was killed accidentally with an air weapon in 2016. As a result of this, the proposals in the consultation are focused on the possession of air weapons by under-18s, secure storage and the safekeeping of air weapons.

Two of the Government's three proposals on air weapons received strong support. 64% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Government should clarify the offence of failing to take 'reasonable precautions' to prevent minors from having air weapons so that whenever under-18s are on the premises, 'reasonable precautions' must include locking the air weapon out of sight when not in use and storing the ammunition separately. 28% of those responding disagreed or strongly disagreed. Some respondents commented on the need to carefully consider the definition of 'locking out of sight' when drawing up legislation.

Almost three-quarters (72%) of those responding agreed or strongly agreed to the question about the Government working with industry to improve the safe keeping and handling of air weapons, to ensure that home security devices are supplied with all new air weapons, and that dealers explain the importance of secure handling and storage to purchasers of new air weapons at the point of sale.

Having carefully considered the responses received, the Government intends to proceed with these two proposals - on clarifying 'reasonable precautions' and on working with industry to improve safety and security. Clarifying the offence of failing to take 'reasonable precautions' will require a change to the Firearms Rules in due course.

The proposal to remove the exception that permits unsupervised possession of air weapons by under 18s on private land with the occupier's consent, was opposed by a majority of respondents. 80% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposal, while 14% agreed or strongly agreed. Some respondents said that removal of the exemption would hinder the ability to carry out pest control on farms, would disadvantage trainee gamekeepers, and that air weapons were a useful introduction to shooting helping to engender responsibility in young people. Some respondents said that it would not be proportionate to remove the 14-17 exemption in view of the low levels of serious misuse of air weapons, and that there should be better enforcement of the existing legislation. In general, those from a shooting background were opposed, while law enforcement representatives and family members of those killed or injured in air weapons shootings were supportive. The (then) National Police Chiefs Council lead for firearms licensing supported all three of the proposals, as did the Metropolitan Police Wildlife Crime Unit.

The Government has given careful consideration to the strong and opposing views put forward in relation to this proposal. **On balance, the Government has decided not to proceed with the amendment to remove the age 14-17 exemption for air weapons because of the very high level of opposition to this measure with 80% of those who responded to the public consultation being opposed to its introduction.** However, the Government will keep the exemption which permits the possession of air weapons by those aged 14-17 on private land with consent, under review, with the possibility that further action could be taken in future. The measures to improve air weapons safety which the Government will take forward include clarifying the 'reasonable precautions' which must be taken to keep air weapons stored securely and away from children, and working with industry so that they take steps to communicate the need for safe handling and security when air weapons are purchased, and together these measures should help to

bring improvements to the safe use and storage of air weapons, particularly in relation to children.

Miniature rifle ranges

Section 11(4) of the Firearms Act 1968 provides an exemption in law which allows a person to run a rifle range or shooting gallery where only small calibre rifles or air weapons are used, without the need for a firearm certificate. Additionally, members of the public do not need a firearm certificate to shoot at such a range or gallery. The exemption is widely used to introduce people to target shooting. However, there are concerns that the exemption may allow unsuitable people to gain access to firearms, with consequent risks to public safety.

The consultation sought views on introducing new controls for miniature rifle ranges while retaining the benefits that these ranges present to shooting sports. The key proposal is that anyone who wishes to operate a miniature rifle range must apply for a firearm certificate and undergo the necessary police checks into their background and suitability, together with inspection of the arrangements for secure storage of the firearms. This would ensure that unsuitable persons, such as those who have been refused a firearm or shotgun certificate or whose certificate has been revoked on suitability grounds, would not be able to use the exemption to avoid proper scrutiny.

There was strong support in the consultation for this proposal, with 73% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that a person operating a miniature rifle range should be required to obtain a firearm certificate. There was also strong support (with 74% agreeing or strongly agreeing) for the proposal that only rifles not exceeding .22 rimfire should be considered as miniature rifles for the purpose of the exemption.

The change in definition of miniature rifle, from 'not exceeding .23 inch calibre' which is set out in the current legislation, was proposed because of the technical advances which have taken place over the years with the result that more powerful weapons can fall within the current definition than the lower-powered firearms to which the miniature rifle range exemption is intended to apply. Taking into account these responses, **the Government intends to proceed with the proposed change to the Firearms Act 1968 so that the miniature rifle range exemption is limited to .22 rimfire weapons.**

Responses from law enforcement representatives, while supportive of the proposal for the operator of a miniature rifle range to be certificated, also commented on the need for accompanying controls to ensure that such ranges operate safely, with proper supervision of participants and inspection of the proposed range by police. The National Police Chiefs Council lead for firearms licensing emphasised the need for safety aspects such as these to be incorporated. Taking into account the responses received, **the Government intends to introduce a requirement for the operator of a miniature rifle range to be issued with a firearm certificate.** Alongside this change, amendment to the Home Office guidance and the introduction of new conditions relating to miniature rifle ranges, will ensure that the operation of miniature rifle ranges in future will be within a secure and safe framework.

These changes will require amendment to primary legislation and will be brought forward when Parliamentary time allows.

Firearms Safety

The consultation included a question asking for views on whether self-loading firearms should be excluded from the miniature rifle range exemption, although the consultation did not put this forward as a proposal. Currently, self-loading firearms can be used on miniature rifle ranges. The responses reflected strong opposition to self-loading firearms being excluded, with 71% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, and 18% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. The responses from law enforcement representatives were mixed, and there was recognition that the ability to use self-loading firearms can assist disabled shooters as they require less manual dexterity. **Considering that the future arrangements for miniature rifle ranges will incorporate controls to ensure proper supervision and a safe environment, the Government does not intend at this stage to remove the ability for self-loading firearms to be used.** However, this aspect will be kept under review in case there is a need to consider further tightening of the arrangements in future.

Finally, a number of respondents indicated that lower-powered air weapons (those that do not fall within the definition of 'specially dangerous' as they are air rifles not exceeding 12 ft pounds or air pistols not exceeding 6 ft pounds) should be excluded from the new requirement for a certificate. The Government agrees with this view, on the basis that these air weapons are not licensed in England and Wales. Therefore, if the miniature rifle range or gallery only uses lower-powered air weapons, it will continue to be the case that the operator does not require a firearm certificate.

Ammunition

Although the key components of ammunition – the propellant and primer – are already controlled, and there are offences relating to the unlawful possession of complete ammunition, law enforcement have expressed concerns that these controls are not sufficient to prevent criminals unlawfully manufacturing ammunition. The consultation sought views on whether current controls on component parts of ammunition remain sufficient or whether they should be strengthened by making it an offence to possess component parts with intent to assemble unauthorised quantities of ammunition.

A majority (62%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that possession of these component parts with intent to manufacture complete rounds of ammunition should be made an offence. Over one quarter (28%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that this should be made an offence.

While supporting a new offence in principle, many respondents drew attention to the fact that a large number of law-abiding shooters reload ammunition to improve accuracy and to provide them with ammunition (for example for vintage or historic firearms) that is not commercially available, as well as to save costs.

There was also a wide range of circumstances where the inert components of ammunition such as empty cartridge cases, bullets, shot, wads etc. are possessed for perfectly lawful purposes such as film and theatre production; form part of antique or militaria collections; are incorporated in nick-knacks or fashion accessories; or are used by the providers of firearms safety training.

It was important therefore that any legislation was drafted in such a way that it did not inadvertently criminalise those who lawfully possess ammunition or component parts of it, and who do not intend to manufacture unauthorised rounds.

It was pointed out that intent is based on a highly subjective, individual state of mind and that each case would have to be taken on its merits having regard to the strict interpretation of section 8 of the Criminal Justice Act 1967. As well as having criminal intent, any legislation should apply only in cases where an unauthorised person possessed all the necessary components viz case, bullet, propellant and primer.

Having carefully considered all the responses to the consultation, **the Government intends to make it an offence to possess component parts with intent to assemble unauthorised quantities of ammunition.** This will require primary legislation to amend the provisions of the Firearms Act 1968, which will be brought forward when Parliamentary time allows. The offence will be drafted in a balanced way to meet the clear concerns that it should not impact adversely on the legitimate home loading of ammunition or other legitimate uses. While possession of all components would go towards proving criminal intent, we think making this a necessary condition of prosecution could be further exploited by criminals seeking a loophole.

On 20 June 2022, a Firearms Bill was put forward in the House of Commons as a presentation Bill. It was ordered that the Bill should be drafted and ready for Second Reading in March 2023.

Consultation principles

The principles that Government departments and other public bodies should adopt for engaging stakeholders when developing policy and legislation are set out in the Cabinet Office Consultation Principles 2018.

Annex A – List of organisations that responded

British Association for Shooting and Conservation
BIAZA (British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums)
British Shooting Sports Council
Cats Protection
Deactivated Weapons Association
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Essex Police
Family members of the victims of air weapons shootings and their MPs
Fifty Calibre Shooters Association
Gun Control Network
Gun Trade Association
Historical Breechloading Smallarms Association
Metropolitan Police, Wildlife Crime Unit
NABIS (National Ballistics Intelligence Service)
National Farmers' Union
National Rifle Association
National Small-bore Rifle Association
Northamptonshire Police
NPCC lead on the Criminal Use of Firearms
NPCC lead on Firearms Licensing
RSPCA
Scottish Association for Country Sports
Showmen's Guild of Great Britain
Society of Independent Roundabout Proprietors
Vintage Arms, Scotland

The remaining responses were from individuals or from respondents who provided no identifying information.

Firearms Safety



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